

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 10570 151503Z

42

ACTION AF-07

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INFO AMCONSUL KADUNA

AMCONSUL IBADAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINR, NI

SUBJECT: TAI SOLARIN RELEASED

REF: LAGOS A-216

SUMMARY: FMG HAS RELEASED NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS TAI SOLARIN AND CHRIS OKOLIE FROM DETENTION. LIMITED PRESS RESPONSE TO SOLARIN CONFINEMENT, WHICH LASTED THIRTY-ONE DAYS, SEEMS TO CONFIRM VIEW THAT FOR MOMENT NEWSPAPERS -- FEARING NEW FMG HARD LINE TO MUFFLE CRITICISM -- HAVE DECIDED TO PULL IN THEIR HORNS. END SUMMARY.

1. FMG RELEASED TWO DETAINED JOURNALISTS ON NOVEMBER 13TH: EDITOR OF NEW BREED MAGAZINE, CHRIS OKOLIE, AND TRIBUNE COLUMNIST TAI SOLARIN. OKOLIE, WHO HAD UNSUCCESSFULLY ATTEMPTED TO PUBLISH ARTICLE APPARENTLY IMPLYING EXISTENCE OF HIGH LEVEL OFFICIAL CORRUPTION, WAS HELD LESS THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. SIARIN, ON OTHER HAND, HAD BEEN IN JAIL FOR THIRTY-ONE DAYS OVER AUTHORSHIP OF HARSHLY-WORDED CIRCULAR OPPOSING FMG DECISION TO REMAIN IN POWER AFTER 1976.

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PAGE 02 LAGOS 10570 151503Z

2. SOLARIN RELEASE CAME TWO DAYS BEFORE HUNGER STRIKE

SCHEDULED BY UNIBADAN STUDENTS TO PROTEST DETENTION SOLARIN AND APER AKU (BUSINESSMAN WHO IN SEPTEMBER ACCUSED BENUE-PLATEAU STATE GOVERNOR GOMWALK OF CORRUPTION). STUDENTS HAVE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR RELEASE, BUT HAVE SAID THEY STILL PLAN TO HOLD STRIKE SINCE AKU HAS NOT BEEN FREED.

3. COMMENT: EXCEPT FOR TRIBUNE, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PRESS REACTION TO SOLARIN DETENTION, WITH MOST NEWSPAPERS RESTRICTING THEMSELVES TO STRAIGHT FACTUAL REPORTING -- IN CONTRAST TO LARGE-SCALE PROTESTS WHICH GENERALLY FOLLOWED SIMILAR POLICE ACTIONS OVER THE PAST YEAR OR TWO. COMPARATIVELY SMALL RESPONSE SEEMS TO CONFIRM VIEW THAT MOST OF PRESS, FEARING EXISTENCE OF NEW FMG HARD LINE TO MUFFLE CRITICISM, HAS FOR MOMENT DECIDED TO PULL IN ITS HORNS (REF AIRGRAM).

4. THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THREATENED HUNGER STRIKE AND SOLARIN RELEASE, ESPECIALLY AS AMCONSUL IBADAN HAS REPORTED THAT POLICE EXPECT STRIKE -- WHICH COINCIDES WITH UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION DAY CEREMONIES -- WILL BE MORE SYMBOLIC THAN REAL. MORE LIKELY, FMG SIMPLY BELIEVED THAT DETENTION HAD ACCOMPLISHED ITS PURPOSE, THOUGH REPORTED SOLARIN ILLNESS OVER LAST TWO DAYS OF CONFINEMENT MAY HAVE HURRIED DECISION.
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